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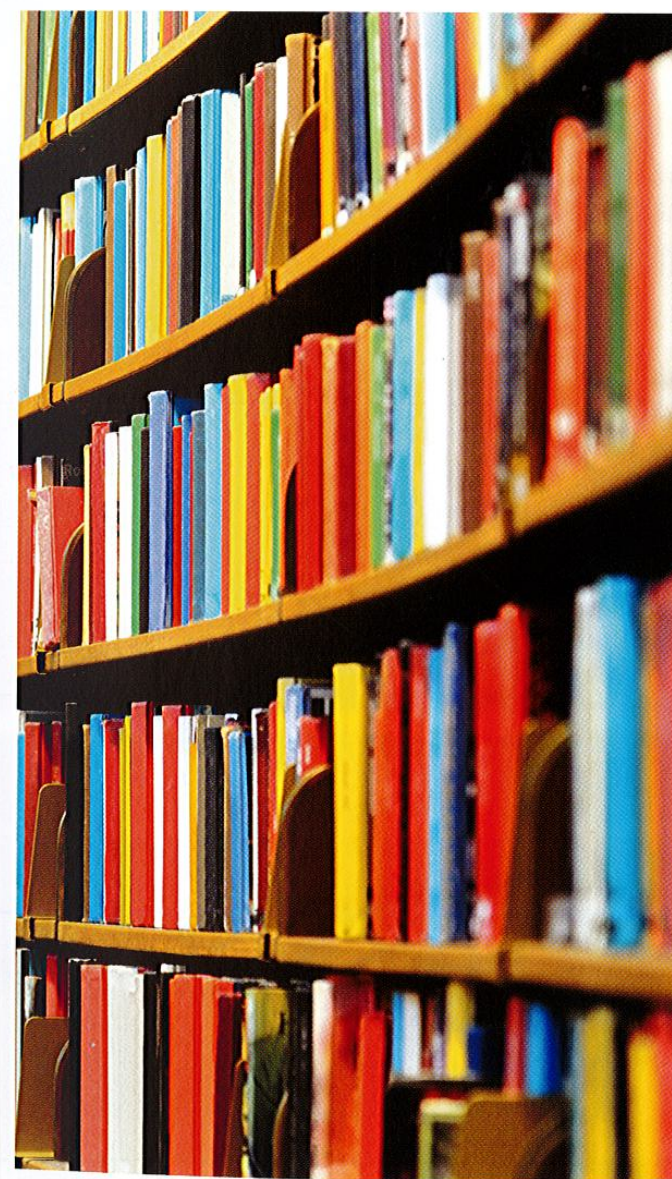
The second part of David Reedy's 2014 Schiller Memorial Lecture edited by Robert Young is published in this issue. The 2015 Memorial lecture given by Professor Peter Blatchford will appear in the summer.

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Choosing The Write Book...

Liz Chamberlain,
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This article outlines the impact of The Write Book, a Year 5 pilot project involving teachers in four different schools across England. The project aimed to improve teachers' practical skills in developing book-based writing projects together with an understanding of how to use a high quality children's text to inspire both reading and writing. The key findings are discussed, alongside the highlighting of the importance of teachers finding just the right book for their pupils.

The Write Book ran from 2013 - 2015 and was a project for Year Five teachers run by Book Trust and funded by the Arts Council. It supported teachers in four primary schools to run whole-of-year-five writing projects inspired by classic or popular children's books, enabling pupils to respond creatively to high quality children's fiction and nonfiction texts. The teachers chose 'The Write Book' for their school: one that they thought would inspire children to enjoy writing. The four schools were located across the country: Southampton, in two London boroughs and in Lancashire. The schools were similar in that they all wanted to develop a creative approach to writing to address pupils' lower-than-expected writing attainment.



Book Trust supported teachers to create engaging writing projects based on the book of their choice. As part of the package of school support, a copy of the chosen book was given to every child in the Year Five classes. In addition, the teachers from across the schools came together on a number of occasions which were called Teacher Inspiration Days to share good practice and work with well-known children's writers to inspire ideas. Teachers then worked together to formulate a plan for the project, ran it in classes and captured their successes and challenges in case studies. Over the two academic years of the project, teachers developed their confidence in using books to inspire children's writing and many of the schools continue to implement long-term reading and writing strategies using books as a focus for writing.

At the first Teacher Inspiration day, the teachers came together and spent the day with children's author Christopher Edge. He introduced a series of writing activities using books as the starting point, including creating prequels, sequels, mashups and film trailers. Christopher and the Book Trust team supported the teachers in choosing 'The Write Book' for their first project. Selecting just the right story (or non-fiction title) led to a number of discussions based on: the interests of the children, the units being studied in Year Five and the expertise of the teachers, and choosing a book which had a sense of importance and excitement. It was important for the teachers to consider the type of book their children might have enjoyed earlier, or to reflect on books which might surprise and delight them, either because of a quirky, imaginative story, immersive illustration or indeed a high production value. The aim of raising the profile of discussions around texts is reflected in the idea that children's literature can be a natural avenue for encouraging and motivating young writers (Morrow, 2005).

Teachers were delighted to know that every child in the year would receive a copy of whatever book was chosen, and they knew that the opportunity for the children to own a book would impact positively on the children's engagement with the project. It was important for children to feel that they were receiving a 'special' book and they took the books home whilst working on the project. The commitment to giving each child a book is based on a number of Book Trust's book-gifting schemes including

Activities included creating a variety of engaging writing activities including scrapbook journals, newspaper reports, fairy potions, writing inspired by graveyards, poems and scripts for book trailers.

Bookstart, Booktime and Bookbuzz and reflects studies which suggest that children who own books enjoy reading more than those who don't (Clark & Poulton, 2011). The teachers also liked the idea of knowing that they were creating a library of quality texts to use with future classes.

In terms of project delivery, the schools all took a slightly different approach but were agreed on a similar format for each of the two projects (one in each academic year over the two years). The projects were designed to last several weeks, with the first week an opportunity for the children to immerse themselves in the chosen text. Activities

included creating a variety of engaging writing activities including scrapbook journals, newspaper reports, fairy potions, writing inspired by graveyards, poems and scripts for book trailers. Over the following weeks, writing-focused activities were incorporated into literacy lessons, formed the basis of whole days of writing and craft sessions, alongside educational visits and showcase events. The second year's project often built on the success of the first, as the teachers became more confident at identifying creative writing opportunities. Over the next two Teacher

Inspiration days the teachers shared outcomes of their project and their children's work; this shared experience and the opportunity to share good practice was highly rated by the teachers and cited as a key benefit of the project.

The project posed a challenge for teachers, as it required them to draw on their own knowledge of children's books in order to find a suitable text to use with their classes. When discussing where and how they found books, the teachers stated that it was not always easy to find the time to research more contemporary books and that their own canon of texts was based on books introduced in their initial teacher training, or favourites from childhood. A recommendation from the research, Teachers as Readers (2009), was that initiatives should be introduced to support teachers in extending their reading repertoire, and this was one key aspect addressed by The Write Book.

At the Teacher Inspiration days the teachers enjoyed spending time looking through new and contemporary books, as well as drawing on the expertise of the Book Trust team. The teachers were also introduced to a practical reference source which they were able to add to their schools' learning resources, the Book Trust Bookfinder - www.booktrust.org.uk/books/#/d/books/bookfinder/109,

which is frequently updated to feature the best in books for children and young people.

The teachers chose a range of texts, both fiction and non-fiction, from both known authors and maybe some less well-known, and included one book from the new Children's Laureate, Chris Riddell.

Having chosen the right book the teachers felt confident in running projects that would support and develop the young writers in their classes. One of the positive outcomes was the expected attainment increase in the children's writing, with each school's data reflecting an upward trend for all their pupils. Of particular importance to the teachers was the increase in children's confidence towards creative writing. In year two of the project, 83 per cent of children said they had enjoyed the creative writing project, and 87 per cent of them thought their creative writing had improved since being involved and, of particular note, 78 per cent of the children said they liked creative writing more as a direct result of the project. At the final Teacher Inspiration Day, the individual stories behind the data were shared, and it was this aspect that brought to life the many benefits of the project. In particular, the teachers commented on the project's impact on specific groups of learners including pupils with EAL, quiet girls and reluctant writers. The schools had also taken the opportunity to involve the wider community in the promotion of reading and writing for pleasure by inviting parents to end-of-project celebrations and writing workshops.

Such findings are encouraging and exciting and following the final Inspiration Day, The Write Book's evaluation identified eight key findings. These provide a useful starting point to some of the current and key debates for teachers about reading and writing. In particular, there continues to be an on-going concern about primary pupils' writing attainment (Ofsted, 2009; Fisher, 2006; Ofsted, 2005), together with an annual surveys suggesting that children often report that they do not enjoy writing (Clark, 2014). This is often characterised by an apparent reluctance amongst boys to choose writing as something they do for pleasure.

The Write Book's findings are grouped into eight themes and are discussed below. In particular, they focus on the children's quality responses to the books, how books can be used as hooks, and the noted increase in teachers' confidence in sourcing quality children's literature.

Children enjoy writing more, and write better, when they're inspired by a high quality book they've loved

Immersing children in the book chosen for each project for relatively long periods (up to 40 hours), meant that they learned more about the plot, setting and characters, and in the case of non-fiction, about the nature of displaying information in different and creative ways. As each child had their own copy of the chosen book, there was the opportunity for them to take the book at their own pace, to mull over passages or to consider the design and layout of the pages, as well as taking them home to read and share with family members. The different books all offered something unique to the reader; whether it was through an illustrated front cover (An Unfortunate Series of Events), the ways in which the text and image combined to create a new reading experience (The Wolves in the Walls), or through the familiarity of a popular TV character (Dr Who Character Encyclopaedia). In addition, there is evidence to suggest that when children are exposed to high quality texts that provides the stimulus for their writing, they benefit both academically and socially (Paquette, 2007). All encouraged the children to go deeper into the text. Subsequently, teachers reported that the children's writing improved because they had a connection with a text they could easily and more importantly wanted to respond to. This was also a key finding from one of Book Trust's previous writing projects, Everybody Writes, in that in order for children to write well, they must have a real reason to write and an authentic audience to write for.

Book choice is key in encouraging children's creative response

At the start of the project, the teachers shared their concerns about knowing which books they might choose to inspire their children. Therefore, boosting teacher confidence around making good book choices was a key aim of the project. Teachers from Heaton Park Primary School were inspired by the ideas shared at the first Teacher Inspiration Day and the writing possibilities that could be generated from using Coraline by Neil Gaiman, and they adopted this text for their first project. Though teachers were more confident in choosing their own books for the second year's projects, the element of expert recommendation, particularly in person from authors or Book Trust staff, was a real success of the project. The teachers enjoyed being shown inspirational and quality texts by enthusiastic experts who could talk about how they might readily be used creatively in the classroom. As a result, teachers became more confident in discussing books and more adept at considering the kinds of writing opportunities different texts could offer.

Children love having more time to read and write at school

As other studies have shown (Bearne et al, 2010), children want more time to write in school. Alongside their teachers, children often feel under pressure to think of good ideas for writing and to then turn those ideas into a final product, all within a one-hour lesson. When The Write Book children were initially asked what they did not enjoy about writing, they reflected the same concerns, 'I don't like that we do not get enough time for creative writing,' and 'The only thing I dislike is sometimes, we are not given enough time for me to put everything I want to in full detail.' As the project developed, and certainly noted within the second year's projects, the teachers became more confident in blocking out a morning or an afternoon for the children to write. Whilst at the beginning, this was a little intimidating for some, as there was a worry that this might be too much time, teachers soon saw the benefits of children writing for longer. Bower (2011:1) reflects this '... when children are given the opportunities to engage more deeply with texts, they can use this power to find a voice, both oral and written.' As always, it is one particular child who provided the greatest insight. The Year Five teacher from Claremont Primary School spoke about the impact having time to write had made on one previously disengaged girl: 'Knowing that she can write at her own pace over time has given her the confidence and self belief that that she is a writer.'

Children enjoy writing when it's taken beyond the classroom or involves an intriguing event

One of the most popular elements of the previous Everybody Writes project, which in many ways informed the initial planning of The Write Book project, was the idea of a whole class or school event taking place beyond the classroom to provide the stimulus for writing – in the school grounds, in community settings or as part of a school trip. The Write Book projects took inspiration from ideas shared at the first Teacher Inspiration Day, and made plans to take children out of their classrooms. There was a celebration assembly that took place in Epping Forest as part of A Midsummer Night's Dream inspired writing project, whilst others visited the local graveyard to write

spooky stories, inspired by Neil Gaiman's Coraline. One school involved the whole school by staging an alien visit, with staff and children reporting on strange and mysterious sightings inspired by Professor Astro's Cat's Frontiers of Space. The final celebration of the project involved the wider community as parents came into school to take a tour around the children's curated space-themed areas.

Teachers value the opportunity to talk to knowledgeable experts about new releases and contemporary children's books

At the first Teacher Inspiration Day, teachers delved into the books that the Book Trust team had brought along and began to discuss and debate the usefulness of the different texts. On initial reading, some books were engaging and seemed like they would make an ideal text, but as the discussion turned towards possible writing opportunities, the book choices shifted. This first afternoon was devoted to looking through the books and the Book Trust team were on hand to offer their guidance and expertise. It was evident that teachers would like to engage in quality book conversations more often, but they are often worried about the lack the time available for them to do so, or their

own perceived lack of expertise. Therefore, a legacy of the project was the creation of the Write Book Toolkit, which has two practical sources of support for teachers: information on how to organise author visits to schools and the online Book finder resource. The Book finder addresses the time issue for teachers as it enables them to locate suitable books using key terms and age range, and having chosen a book there is then a link to the book synopsis.

Using books as inspiration for writing works well with lower achievers and reluctant writers

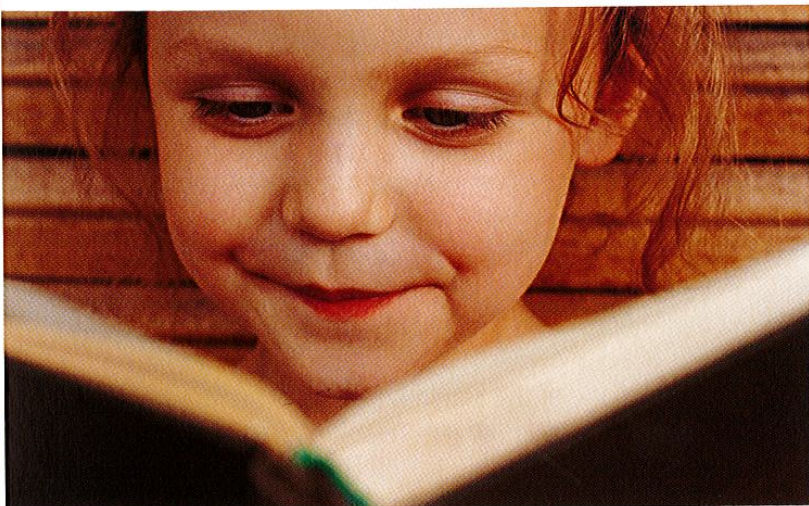
Whilst the Write Book project was intended for all children, teachers reported the greatest success coming from more vulnerable groups, including those less willing to write. Key to this was that the children had time to get to know their books, which highlights the importance of the element of book ownership within the project. The teachers' knowledge of the children also allowed them to choose books that they knew they would enjoy, or was a connection with popular culture, which was certainly

the case of the Doctor Who Character Encyclopaedia. The children's prior knowledge quickly became apparent and the barriers to writing were lessened for those less likely to want to write.

Using 'books as hooks' encourages creative learning and helps embed reading and writing for pleasure deep into the curriculum

One of the original aims of the project was for teachers to make links across subjects and to embed reading and writing throughout the curriculum. For some teachers this was a pedagogical shift, in that they were able to begin to see the benefits of using a book as a starting point for other subjects, e.g., for a science topic on space. In addition, learning outside the classroom became a new approach to learning for one school, as the children's writing around their Coraline project and looking at intriguing doors in the community (and the popular cemetery visit) was so compelling and it led to a noticeably higher quality in writing than in previous writing projects. The use of A Midsummer Night's Dream as a 'Write Book' also allowed children to hear the words of Shakespeare as intended, by hearing it spoken aloud through their own performance leading to a celebratory assembly in the forest.

Whilst the other seven project outcomes led to a discussion about writing and the pedagogy of writing in primary classrooms, one of the key findings of the project focused on the children themselves as developing writers. This was reflected throughout the project and in the children's reflections, 'If I need an idea I know I can think about the other books I've read and adapt them', whilst another child's intention is to, 'read lots of different types of books - picture books and on-picture books - at first they can help



you with your ideas'. This led to the final outcome for both children and teachers in that, **Using high quality books to inspire and emulate writing encourages children to think of themselves as writers**, which must surely be the aspirational outcome of any project which hopes to capture the imaginations and creativity of young writers both within our classrooms and beyond the classroom walls.

For more details on The Write Book including the project evaluation and Teachers' Toolkit for running your own Write Book project:

www.booktrust.org.uk/programmes/primary/the-write-book
The toolkit contains links to Book Trust's Book finder, information on how to arrange a writer visit, fun workshop films from children's authors Tony Bradman and Sarah McIntyre and six free and exclusive one hour writers' workshops to run in your classroom.

Thank you to the schools who took part in the Write Book project and whose work and responses are shared in the article.

- Heaton Park Primary School in Bury, Lancashire
- Sandringham Primary School in Newham, London
- Claremont Primary School in Cricklewood, London
- Swaythling Primary School in Southampton, Hampshire

Further reading:

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'Learning about language when stakes are high'

Part one: Focus on Language, Reading Development and Testing – this was published in the previous edition of Primary First (October, 2015)

Part two: Part two: Focus on Language Development and Knowledge about Grammar – in the second part of the lecture David Reedy examined productive ways of approaching the teaching of grammar in the primary years and its contribution to the development of writing skills.

The Christian Schiller memorial lecture 2014 by David Reedy

Knowledge about language and grammar – beyond labelling.

I am going to start the second area that I want to examine, grammar knowledge, with another quote from Schiller (1948). It is about mathematics but you can substitute grammar and it still makes complete sense.

Young children grow in their power of using number through experience, doing and living through actual experiences (using the generalisation of language), and finally they grow to perceive the idea of relationships between numbers, and the generalisation of mathematics. (p.14)

If we substitute grammar it comes out something like this: Young children grow in their power of using grammar through experience, doing and living through actual experiences (using the generalisation of language), and finally they grow to perceive explicitly the idea of relationships between words and sentences.

It is by using language in real contexts that children develop their use of grammatical structures, sentences, and parts of text which go together to make meaning, whether in writing or when you're reading. And then this implicit understanding can be made explicit and help children to understand what a language user does to make meaning clear to others.